

POLITICAL HISTORY OF NUPE KINGDOM

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asked to divine a victorious general. Invariably his rank would correspond to the importance and scope of the war that is planned. At the same time his office is only nominal. Although he would take the field at the head of the army, and although he would bear the responsibility for success or failure, the actual organization of the campaign is left to the professional soldiers: in an important war the *Maiyaki* himself would take command, in a minor war his next in rank, the *Dokoyiringi*. 721

Now the council of war meets in the house of the *Maiyaki* to discuss the question of raising the levies. The various feudal lords are informed that they are expected to produce so many guns and horses. Preparations take one or two months—the troops must be raised, recruits trained and equipped, and food supplies provided for the campaign. Finally diviners and Mallams are summoned again by the commander of the army to decide on a propitious day. On the appointed day, drummers and trumpeters sound the assembly, and the troops leave Bida on their march into enemy country.

The Nupe never fought by night. Their method was to move up as close as possible to the enemy, hiding in bush and scrub, camp for the night, and attack in the early hours of the morning. In open battle the attacking troops would be arrayed in a long straight line facing the enemy. But often the war would turn into the long siege of a walled village or town, close to which the army would put up its war camp, the troops surrounding the town and cutting the population off from their farms, supplies, and reinforcements. 726

This was the typical formation of the Nupe army in open battle: first came the foot-soldiers, the various household troops each under their *Etsu Dakari*, commanded by an officer of the king, the *Sónhali*. Behind them, at a distance of a quarter of a mile, a first troop of horsemen halted, under the *Sokyara*, and with it the lesser military and civil nobility. Behind this group again another, larger, detachment of cavalry was posted, under the highest generals of the army, the *Uban Dawaki* and *Dokoyiringi*. With these troops were the higher civil and military nobility and certain princes of lesser rank. The infantry would move first, sent into the battle by the shouts of the *Sokyara*: 'Kay Dakari', 'Forward! foot-soldiers'. When they had engaged the enemy, the cavalry of the *Sokyara* would charge after them, the *Dokoyiringi* giving the signal with shouts of 'Kay Sokyara'. The *Dokoyiringi*'s own troops would charge last, to the signals of the long bronze trumpets which only the troops of the highest military ranks may carry. There would also be drums and flutes, and the soldiers would shout the *kirari* of their leaders and sing their war songs. [534]

In the rear of the troops the reserve was placed, which would come into the fight only if the other troops were unable to master the situation. It was commanded by the *Maiyaki*, with whom were also the princes of highest rank, including the commander-in-chief. In the last big war, against the Yagba (the same war which ended in the conquest of Bida by the British), the infantry is said to have numbered 6,000, the cavalry of the *Sokyara* 400, those of the *Dokoyiringi* 1,000, and the reserve 2,000 men.

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942

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EFAKÓ WORK ON A FARM NEAR BIDA



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FARMING EGBE

[FACING p. 248]

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1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942

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ONE OF THE ETSU'S KAKATI PLAYERS



A PROFESSIONAL SINGER WITH HER BAND

[Facing p. 300]

x 796 sacrifice previously described; again, there is a big tree in the middle, this time adorned with a strip of white cloth, which is renewed at each ceremonial; if the village has a 'born' *Ndazo*, he will wear the new cloth round his waist while officiating, and put it back on the tree afterwards. Also tied to the tree are two tortoise shells, which will serve as drinking vessels during the sacrifice and afterwards as musical instruments, being beaten with small sticks. The other musical instruments used in the *gunnu* are as
 ● [534] unusual and are employed on no other occasion; they consist in two large and two small pot drums (of Gwari manufacture), and a raft-zither made of reed. During the year they are stored in the house of the *Zigi*, who has, however, no other function in the *gunnu*.

x 796 On the day of the *gunnu*, before dawn, the *gunnu* drums begin
 881 to play. This is the signal for the boys and young men to leave their homes and to go to some secret place in the bush, led by the *Ndazo* and the *Ndakotsu* (the appointed leader of their age grades). Arrived in the bush, where they may only talk in whispers, they remove their caps and everyday clothes and dress in *gunnu* fashion, that is, in a loincloth of striped cloth such as the women wear round the waist. They break off twigs of the *nübeci* tree, which will later serve as the 'whips of the *gunnu*'.¹ Then the novices are taught the deportment required of them at the ceremonial—to keep their heads bent, eyes on the ground, as one does in the presence of superiors; equally they are taught the *gunnu* salute, which consists in a fierce yell, accompanied by the throwing-up of both arms and a rhythmical stamping on the ground. During these proceedings the novices at least are visibly frightened, while the older boys try to show their unconcern. Finally, they leave the bush, walking in single file, the tallest first, to the place of the sacrifice; throughout the ceremonial the young men will move thus, in a long file, 'whips' in hand, led or sometimes driven by the priest and the *Ndakotsu*.

At the *gunnu* place they join the older men who have meanwhile assembled. The musicians sit under the tree and have started drumming and singing. Everyone is stripped to the waist and sits on leaves or branches, since it is sacrilege to sit on the bare ground of the *gunnu* 'ba. The older men form a circle round the place of the sacrifice; the youths sit some distance apart, though they will from time to time jump up to 'salute' late-comers or to drive away strangers who might trespass on the secret site. Soon the sacrifice follows, which varies from year to year, according to the advice of

[789] ¹ This tree has no further ceremonial significance, though its twigs are sometimes stuck into the ground outside a house as a charm against thieves.

RITUAL

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Aratò, one makes the *mamma*,
Arato, the drum of *mamma* (is playing).
 By night, the drum of *mamma* is speaking.

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They are making the *mamma* with it together,
 They are making the *mamma* with it together
 ('it' refers to the *kuti*, the phrase meaning—
 in the ceremonial masks and *kuti* are one).

x796 The people have no theory why the cult should be particularly
 751 frightening to the women; on the contrary, they emphasize that
 the *mamma* is meant to frighten all evil doers and deny that it has
 any bearing on witchcraft (which is wielded essentially by women).
 Yet the cult is clearly the men's secret and seems to express male
 dominance and some antagonism between the sexes. Oddly
 enough, one of the ritual paraphernalia, the smallpox medicine, is
 described as a woman's gift. But let me leave this point for the
 moment and only point out that the *mamma*, which cleanses the
 community from evil influences, fittingly initiates the cycle of rites
 meant to procure more positive benefits—timely floods, as in the
ndáduma, or health and fertility, as in the *dzakó*.

x796 The latter ritual is supposed to succeed the *mamma* by ten days,
 though the performance I witnessed took place seventeen days later,
 on 3rd December. The *dzakó* is performed in public, without secrecy,
 in front of the sacred relics of Tsoede, two bronze figures of a man
 ● [54] and a woman. Special musical instruments are used, two gourd
 rattles, and three drums hung with brass bells and other orna-
 ments again attributed to Tsoede. The congregation during the
 sacrifice itself consists of the thirteen elders of Jebba, as usual
 bareheaded and stripped to the waist, and carrying long staves;
 but other men and women, even children, may watch and will later
 join in the dance. The officiant of the ritual is the *Ndace* (the
 'Father of Hunting'), though the ritual has nothing to do with
 hunting. Nor has the rank itself this particular connotation. In
 Jebba, it is an elder's rank among others, though one specifically
 connected with the relics of Tsoede; for the *Ndace* is one of the four
 men who serve (or used to serve) as the 'executioners' wielding the
 Chain of Tsoede.

The ceremonial starts in the afternoon, with a sacrifice in front
 of the bronze figures, during which the officiant has the two rattle
 players on his right and left. The place on the priest's left, opposite
 the female figure, signifies 'birth', the place on his right, opposite
 the male figure, 'health'; which symbolism of right and left is

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954

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16. Circumcision operation



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17. A bridal procession

[p. 118 (A)]

[P.134 (A)]



20. A noted medicine expert and 'wise man' from
Jebba

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21. The dance of the *ndakó gboyd*

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2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
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STRANGE GODS

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of my Mokwa informants, a man of about sixty, the *elo* dancers used to wear skirts and cloaks made of dried grass, probably like those worn in the *mamma* ritual of Jebba; it was only later that the cloth hoods were adopted, 'because they looked nicer'. I have no doubt that they were modelled on the almost identical dress of the *gugu* dancers, with which the Mokwa people at least are so thoroughly familiar. They themselves disclaim any such connection, which is admittedly not borne out by any other features of the two cults.

Granting the alien origin of the *elo*, we must add that it has been fairly thoroughly Nupe-ized. To begin with, it has taken its place among the 'fixed' ceremonials, being performed annually in the 9th month (in Mokwa and Rabah) or 6th month (in Gbajibo). Like the other Nupe ceremonials, the *elo* is in the charge of one of the titled elders, whose office includes the responsibility for the annual performance and the tuition of the dancers. The most important mask, called *elohó* ('Great *elo*'), is also stored in his house, while the other masks and dresses are kept in the houses of other rankholders. When the masks appear in the dance they are addressed, in Nupe fashion, by a special salute, *eluló* ('Bird of *elo*'); the songs are in Nupe, the style of the music and most dance steps are typically Nupe, as are also the drums which are played throughout the dance.¹ But the dance performance itself has retained its uncommon character. All the dancers are men; but among them are three, wearing highly ornamented masks with curved twin horns, who are said to represent 'female' figures, the mask of the 'Great *elo*' belonging to this category. Two other dancers, wearing hoods pulled over their faces and head-dresses of feathers, are described as 'male'. Two more figures, wearing simple masks surmounted by one straight horn, are called *gava* (lit. 'robber'). These last figures are perhaps the most unusual; for while the 'male' and 'female' masks stalk about, or jump and dance much as do ordinary dancers or the masks in the *ndahó gboyá* and *mamma*, the *gava* plays the part of a bogey-man who frightens the children; and of a clown whose pranks delight old and young; which double role is otherwise unknown in Nupe dance ceremonial. The behaviour of the 'male' and 'female' masks, incidentally, is in no way suggestive of this ascription of sex. In addition, there are two unmasked young men who join in the dancing and clowning and wear fringed skirts made of leopard skin, their bare legs being painted with white spots ('like the spots of leopards')—another conspicuously non-Nupe feature.

The most incongruous aspect of the *elo* lies in its purpose, or

¹ The *elo* includes only one musical instrument uncommon in Nupe, an iron double-bell, beaten with a stick.

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467 the villages drumming is mainly a side-line to farming. Drummers in Bida form
533 small bands or companies, the origins of which, and the type of their performance,
535 vary. Both men and women perform and women sing. Members of a single group
may come from different families. There are no *efako* arrangements. Such a band
may be in a *bars* (client) relationship to a nobleman. The various bands or com-
panies do not co-operate. The drums are made by wood-workers on the river.²⁰

464 Western crafts are practised for wages in the workshops of the N.A. Public
Works Dept. These craftsmen include blacksmiths, mechanics, carpenters, and
bricklayers. Temporary unskilled labour is employed mainly in occasional work
demanding a large body of unskilled labour, such as construction work of various
kinds. Most of these labourers go home and return to their permanent work at the
end of their temporary employment. Those who are farmers seek temporary
employment during the dry season only, to supplement the normal source of
income.²¹

Women's crafts

323 Pottery is practised individually. Jebba Island, Baro, Badeggi, and Bida are
462 famous for their pottery and there is a regular trade in both potters' clay and pots.
The main products are small water jugs and large water containers. Clay is pre-
pared from swamps at Gbako River, at Badeggi, and sold by the villagers. It is
tempered with powdered potsherd or brick. The building of the pots is individual
work, but firing is undertaken collectively. Pots are simply fired, then given a brown
462 wash or blackened with a concoction of shea-nut bark.

[52] Shea-butter manufacture is carried out by women, but the roasting ovens are
built by men.

[38] Indigo-dyeing is practised only by a few *Konú* groups, where the men are
weavers and the women dyers. The indigo-grass and the indigo-tree are cultivated
by men, but where the indigo is picked and prepared from wild growing grass, the
work is done by women. The dye-pot platforms are made by women; the dyeing
is carried out individually. There are a few groups of male dyers (e.g., in Mokwa),
who use a rather different technique from that employed by the women.

[28] Women's weaving is done on upright looms 21 ins. broad, which may be of
Yoruba origin. Among the Basa-Nge, older women weave patterned raffia.
Fishing-nets in Kede are made by old men and women from *rama* fibre.²²

411 Weapons and tools include spears, bows and poisoned arrows used by the more
remote groups, and knives with blades 8 to 10 ins. long. A few men use flint-locks,
and formerly a whole section of the Nupe army was equipped with guns.

501 Dug-out canoes are used by the Bataci as well as the Kyedye. Those of the
latter are large and square with caulked top strakes. They are mostly obtained
from Onitsha and the lower Benue.

534 Musical instruments include a central-hole flute (the blow-hole is midway
[64] between the ends of the tube), pipes, clarinets (of Hausa origin), various drums and
rattles, long bronze trumpets (forming part of the royal insignia), and, in some
areas, bull-roarers and animal horns.

532 Gabi figures are statues of different origins. Two bronze figures stand unpro-
778 tected in the centre of the village of Jebba Island near a dilapidated hut which is
said to have been formerly a temple. There are seven figures at Tada village which
are kept in a round hut and carefully tended; some of these are human figures and
some animal and they appear to be of diverse origins, but are regarded traditionally
as having been left by Tsoede on his flight up the Niger.²³

²⁰ Nadel, *op cit.*, pp. 301-3. For an outline of the *bars* system see below, p. 28.

²¹ Nadel, *op cit.*, pp. 304-5.

²² Nadel, *op cit.*, pp. 235, 293-7; Hopkins, 1934; Notes on Kede District, 1950.

²³ Temple, 1919, pp. 114, 117, 198, 332; Meek, 1925, vol. I, p. 106; Walker, 1934; see also Palmer, 1931.